

The Waterbird Society



Mrs. Lucia Chandeck
General Administrator/Minister of Environment
National Environment Authority (ANAM)
Principal Building 804
Albrook, Panama
Panama - C-Zone 0843 - Balboa, Ancon
Panama

Your Excellency,

18 September 2012

I am writing this letter on behalf of The Waterbird Society, which is a member of the Ornithological Societies of North America (OSNA) and an international organization composed of professionals and students engaged in research and conservation of waterbird species. The society's primary goals include fostering science-based waterbird conservation and facilitating communication between professionals, policy makers and citizens regarding environmental issues affecting waterbirds.

Nine proposed development projects threaten the integrity of wetlands and mangrove forests in and around the Juan Diaz and Tocumen areas of Panama. These areas are heavily utilized by millions of waterbirds annually for nesting. Surveys of nesting waterbirds in 2005 and 2006 determined a nesting population of 25,911 waterbirds in the Gulf of Panama with 6,981 of these birds nesting in wetland or mangrove habitats (Waterbirds, Angehr and Kushlan 2007). Mudflats, marshes and mangroves in the vicinity of Panama City are important foraging areas for many of these species and destruction or degradation of wetland and mangrove swamps will have a direct impact on nesting and foraging activities. In addition to large waterbirds, the tidal marshes and mangroves in the Juan Diaz area serve as important refueling sites for small migratory shorebirds. An estimated 1 to 2 million shorebirds utilize the wetlands surrounding Juan Diaz annually. This region has been recognized by the international scientific community as an area of global significance for conservation (Birdlife International) and included in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN), an international strategy that works closely with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands to ensure the wise use of wetland sites in the Americas (Montenegro and Guerrero 2012).

In addition to the values of these wetlands for the birds themselves, wetlands are recognized as providing services important to ecotourism such as fishing, bird watching and aesthetics. The wetlands in and around the Tocumen area are some of the best surviving marshes in Panama (Angehr et al. 2008). Their importance to the future of ecotourism in Panama is recognized by Panama's National Policy of Wetlands, which is designed to "...maintain the ecologic integrity and the rational use of the wetlands before the national objectives to increase the competitiveness of the country..." and the National Plan for the Protected Areas of Panama (SINAP) which calls for "...the sustainable conservation, preservation, restoration, and use of biodiversity..." (page 101, Strategic Plan of the Government 2010-2014).

If the proposed projects in the Tocumen and Juan Diaz areas are indeed critical to move forward, our organization strongly recommends that wetland scientists and biologists be involved to help mitigate the potential damages to the coastal environment, and that some potential conservation exchange be established to more strongly protect other coastal areas.

With Kindest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katharine C. Parsons". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katharine Parsons
President
The Waterbird Society